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## ABSTRACT

Social class discrimination in the schooling process is less a product of teachers' attitudes than of the systems by which schools group students. Although class bias has been demonstrated in grading practices and other key decision points, numerous studies have shown that teachers are less to blame for inequitable learning situations than tracking and curriculum decisions based on ability grouping. The ethnic bias of most intelligence tests indicates that ability placements are unfair. Class discrimination in tracking is shown by the fact that more lower class students than middle class students are placed in low groups. Once placed in a low group, students have a tendency to achieve less and to have very little upward mobility. Curriculum tracking is also discriminating in that it influences college choices, class rank, and scholarship aid.

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The De Facto Screw

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The literature on social class bias in education is reviewed restricting attention to studies dealing specifically with behavior, rather than attitudes or expectations. In particular the focus is on teacher behavior in the classroom and on specific decisions by teachers and other school personnel regarding grades, tracking and curriculum placement. It is argued that social class differentials derive almost entirely from the fairly objective application of objective criteria (usually ability) rather than from discrimination on the basis of social class per se. The deleterious consequences of applying ability-based criteria are examined.

A recurrent finding is that student's social class is related to school performance (Davis, 1948; Eells et al., 1951; Haggard, 1954; Heimann and Schenk, 1954; Deutsch, 1960; Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, 1965; Coleman et al., 1966; Fleischmann Report, 1972) and to educational attainment (Folger and Nam, 1967; Spady, 1967; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1969; Sewell, 1971; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973; Treiman and Terrell, 1975). A variety of factors have been proposed as accounting for these findings: genetic endowment, socialization and encouragement within the family, socialization within the peer group, achievement context of the school, social class bias of school personnel and the nature of the opportunity structure of the larger society.

This paper will explore only one of the above factors - social class bias of school personnel. Studies will be reviewed in an attempt to demonstrate that social class discrimination in the schooling process is both myth and reality. Only a small part of the attainment and achievement differentials can be explained by class biased behavior of school personnel, yet this is not to say that lower class students are not subject to discrimination in schools. Discrimination occurs not because school personnel's behavior or decisions vary as a function of social class per se, but as a function of objective criteria and procedures, more or less objectively applied, which affect lower class pupils disproportionately and detrimentally.

Numerous studies have been done which examined teachers' expectations and attitudes toward students of different social class backgrounds. Overall,

in most studies in which social class of pupil is an independent variable, lower class membership is associated with lower teacher expectations and more negative teacher attitudes than middle class membership. (For a review of these studies see Amato, 1976). These studies will not be discussed for three reasons:

1. Most studies which have involved teachers expressing their attitudes toward "real" students, as opposed to fictitious pupil profiles, have not been controlled studies. Consequently, one could not be certain that the differences in expectations and perceptions were attributable to social class per se or to a whole variety of student differences (performance, behavioral and personality differences) which might have been confounded with differences in students' social class.

2. Few studies have been done which articulate the relationship between teacher attitudes and behavior. It is possible that teachers may view lower class pupils as dull and unmotivated, yet work harder with them because they feel such students need more attention, not less.

3. If teacher attitudes, and those of other school personnel, are to have any effect on student achievement or educational attainment, they must first be expressed as behavior. Given this, it seems reasonable that school personnel's classroom behavior and/or behavior at key decision points in the schooling process should be the focus of inquiry.

Turning to studies of teacher behavior, one finds that there is no dearth of studies and of anecdotal reports relating the discrimination that lower class children experience in schools. A major problem with many such studies is that very few studies have controlled for other variables (e.g., ability, performance and/or behavioral differences) which in real life are

often confounded with social class. Studies which have controlled for some, but not all, confounding variables will be presented here.

Looking first at classroom behavior studies, it is obvious that differential classroom treatment by social class has been asserted for some time. Davis and Dollard (1960) reported that lower class children monopolized teacher criticisms while teacher rewards went to upper status children. Although Clifton (1944), in a study of 25 teachers of second grades which varied as to the SES of the children, found that the teachers behaved very similarly in terms of their contacts with pupils, he did note that teachers in areas of highest status level had slightly more "highly integrative" contacts and slightly fewer conflict contacts with their pupils than teachers in other areas. More recently, Friedman and Friedman (1973) found that significantly more total reinforcement went to middle class than to lower class children when they observed 24 fifth and sixth grade classrooms.

Becker (1952), based on interview data, and Leacock (1969) reported other differences in classroom behavior in classes that varied by social class. Concerning discipline, Becker found that in slum schools teachers felt the need to use stern measures, including physical force, while in schools whose population was mainly middle class teachers felt that strong sanctions were not as necessary since mild reprimands were sufficient. Leacock found that teachers' goal settings was very affected by the SES of the class: in a three-hour period, 12 and 13 goal setting statements were produced in the two classes in the lower income black school, 15 and 18 in the lower income white school, and 43 and 46 in the middle income white school she studied. Teachers in the lower income schools gave up on children sooner than did teachers in middle class schools: in the lower income black schools

the teacher quickly stopped working with a child when he encountered difficulty; in contrast, the teacher in the middle income black school gave such a child time and help to work on the problem.

Rist (1970) followed one class of children from kindergarten through second grade and observed several differences in teacher behavior toward "lower class" and "middle class" children. E.g., in the kindergarten class, within a few days of the term's beginning, the more middle class pupils (the study was done in an urban ghetto school) were called on more often to take messages to the office, pass out materials, be in charge of playground equipment and, in general, charged with more responsibilities indicative of the teacher's preference. The higher status pupils were even placed physically closer to the teacher in the seating arrangement. The higher status pupils also were called on more often and received more support for their responses. However, the differences that Rist noted in teacher behavior cannot be unequivocally attributed to pupil's social class per se since the children's social class status was confounded with behavioral and performance differences that occurred along social class lines, e.g., the favored pupils were more articulate and showed leadership qualities.

Richer (1974) carried out an observational study of three classrooms within the same school in Canada. Each classroom was observed for six one-half hour sessions. He found that in teacher-centered class sessions (defined in his study as those sessions displaying 43% or less student-initiated interactions) lower class pupils received significantly less than expected teacher-student interactions while children in the professional class received more than expected. Further analysis found that the above difference was due as much to fewer student initiated interactions by the lower class children as to fewer teacher initiated interactions.

Hoehn (1954) studied teacher behavior in 19 third grade classrooms, involving 532 pupils, all of whom were of Old American ethnic stock. Each class was observed for five hours and the Anderson-Brewer Dominative-Socially Integrative instrument was used to code the teachers' contacts with pupils. Hoehn found that the amount of attention received by a child did not vary by social class. Teachers were not more likely to tend toward conflict with lower class pupils than with middle class pupils. However, when sex was controlled the hypothesis of more conflict contacts with lower status children was supported with teachers tending toward more conflict with lower class girls than with middle class girls. The ratio of integrative to dominative contacts was significantly higher for middle class than for lower class students. However, Hoehn did not stop with a tally of types of teacher behavior by social class. He examined teacher contacts with high and lower achievers and found several differences. Quantitatively low achievers were favored with more teacher contacts than high achievers. Qualitatively high achievers were favored, with high achievers receiving a greater proportion of promotive and supportive contacts while low achievers received a greater proportion of conflictive and dominative teacher contacts. Hoehn reports that the noted qualitative differentiation of teacher behavior as a function of pupil social class was an incidental effect of the teachers' tendency to favor high achievers. When pupils' achievement was controlled, the differences by social class disappeared. Gabbert (1973) replicated Hoehn's findings.

Earlier we referred to school personnel's behavior at key decision points. The key decision points we are interested in include grading on report cards, ability grouping and curriculum track placements. Wilson studied grading practices and found that children with high social class

background (executive or professional) received more A's and B's in reading than their test performance would warrant. Whether this differential in grading is completely due to social class bias cannot be ascertained, since grades are typically affected by factors other than ability, e.g., motivation, teacher's feeling that child is working up to his potential, and one cannot tell from Wilson's study if these other factors varied with social class membership.

Several studies report social class bias in tracking procedures. In a large scale study of tracking effects, Husen and Svensson (1960) found that even when their achievement warranted it, lower class students did not move as frequently into higher tracks as did students from higher social class homes. Douglas (1964) in Britain found that of those students who were misplaced into tracks (misplaced in terms of ability), high SES students and students whose personality pleased the teacher were misplaced upwards, and low SES students and students whose personality displeased the teacher were misplaced downwards. Goldberg *et al.* (1966) found that lower SES children tended to be placed in lower tracks and higher SES children in higher tracks than their measured ability would justify. Davis (1973) found that teacher-formed reading groups were more segregated by social class (greater spread in mean SES of high and low groups) than the reading groups would have been if they were formed on the basis of ability alone.

In general, the practice of ability grouping tends to separate and segregate students along social class lines (Findley and Bryan, 1971). Davis (1973) and others suggest that this separation of social class groups based on ability is enhanced by social class bias on the part of the teacher. The question is how much does social class bias contribute to socioeconomic segregation of ability groups over and above what would be expected given the

correlation of SES and ability? From Davis (1973), who reports data that would permit consideration of this issue, the answer seems to be "Not much". The social class segregation that resulted when teachers formed groups, supposedly using SES as well as ability information, was not much more than would have resulted if groups were formed completely on the basis of ability. Studies discussed by Findley and Bryan (1971) suggest that in some cases social class bias may account for a rather large amount of student segregation by social class. However, a problem with several of the studies they discuss is their implicit assumption that any separation by SES that is not directly due to ability is evidence of social class bias. The contribution of students' ratings on other criteria besides ability (e.g., attendance, motivation, work habits) to SES segregation are not considered. Rather it seems such ratings are themselves viewed as expressions of social class bias. Whether the ratings are merely subtle expressions of social class bias would depend upon whether the ratings correlate more highly with SES than with achievement, since their assumed correlation with achievement is the rationale for their use in making tracking decisions. Unfortunately, we know of no studies that have addressed this question.

At the high school level several studies (Warner et al., 1944; Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Heyns, 1974) have noted a relationship between student social class and curriculum placement. If one views curriculum placement as primarily a matter of self-selection on the part of the student, social class bias on the part of school personnel does not seem to be a relevant issue to consider. However, Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) argue persuasively against the view that high schools passively implement students' choices; rather they assert that high schools selectively reinforce the aspirations of some students while redefining and redirecting the aspirations of others. While

both Warner et al. (1944) and Schafer and Olexa (1971) have argued that student social class has a large influence on curriculum placement over and above its association with ability, only Heyns attempted to measure the amount of variance in curriculum placement explained by social class when verbal ability was controlled. Controlling for verbal ability, social class was found to have very little effect on curriculum placement; almost all of its effect operated through differences in verbal ability.

Alexander  
and McDill  
(1976) found  
attraction.

In sum, there is very little evidence of discrimination in the schooling process based on social class per se, yet we stated earlier that the lower class student is an object of discrimination. The lower class student suffers at several key points in the schooling process, not because criteria are applied in a biased manner based on social class membership, but because of the nature of the criteria used to make decisions and the negative consequences that disproportionately affect lower class students when they are applied.

Students' placements in ability groups and their assignment to high school curricula are critical points in their school careers. Most of the literature supports the view that track and curriculum decisions are primarily made on the basis of ability and achievement related criteria. This process seems fair if one thinks of ability as a fair criterion and if, after applying the criterion, injurious consequences do not accrue to any of the groups differentiated by the criterion's application. The first requirement of fairness can be questioned by noting the issue of social class and ethnic bias of most intelligence tests. This point will not be pursued further because it has been discussed at length by numerous researchers and could provide the content for several papers. We will focus instead on the second requirement.

Ability grouping is a relatively widespread phenomenon: a 1971 survey of school districts in all 50 states found that, of responding districts,

55% group generally and 77% group to some extent. The effect of ability grouping on achievement has been studied extensively, but the results do not form one pattern for all students. Rather the pattern of results is different for students of different ability levels. For high ability students the results of studies are contradictory: some find higher, while others find lower, achievement than occurs in heterogeneous classes. For average and low ability students, studies seldom show higher, and most often show lower, achievement than occurs for students of comparable ability in heterogeneous classes. Given that grouping based on ability tends to separate and segregate students along social class lines, with high ability groups having a disproportionate number of middle class students and low ability groups having a disproportionate number of lower class students (Findley and Bryan, 1971), lower class students are forced to bear the negative consequences of ability grouping more so than middle class students. The position of the lower class student - who was initially tracked low because of ability - is then confirmed by his lower achievement. Over time both the teacher and the student may come to see the tracking decision as justified. "Victim blaming" by the teacher is not necessary; the victim blames himself.

At the high school level, where the most important tracking distinction is between curricula, placement by ability results in curriculum assignments that correlate highly with social class. Schafer and Olexa (1971) investigated the effects of college prep and non-college prep track on a variety of variables when father's occupation, and student's IQ and prior achievement were controlled. They found that;

"...non-college prep students experienced lower academic achievement, greater decline and less improvement in achievement, less participation in extracurricular activities, greater misconduct in school, a greater tendency to drop out, and greater delinquency." (pp. 49-50)

They found that teachers had grade floors for college prep students and grade ceilings for non-college prep students: no matter how good the performance of the latter, teachers seldom gave them a grade higher than C. They hypothesized that the stigma attached to non-college prep track resulted in students having unfavorable self-concepts which, in turn, led to higher drop-out and delinquency rates.

Curriculum tracking also has several long term consequences:

1. It influences who attends college since colleges often require applicants to have pursued an academic curriculum and to submit averages which are adjusted for track placement (High school tracking, 1972).

2. Since non college prep students' grades tend to be lower than college prep students' grades, their class ranks tend to be lower also. This, in turn, affects both whether a student is admitted to college and whether he receives scholarship aid.

The stigma and other consequences of tracking are enhanced by the fact that there is very little upward mobility in the track system (High school tracking, 1972). In the Schafer and Olexa study (1971) only 7% of non-college prep students switched into college prep. Once a student is tracked low he tends to stay there, a forecast perhaps of his later position in life. Although both the college and non-college prep student may both receive a diploma (in some schools even the diplomas differ), the subjective experience of schooling and its consequences appear to be quite different. Given the association of social class and track placement, tracking may be seen as a mechanism for teaching the lower class adolescent his place.

From the above, it should be obvious that eliminating social class bias in the application of criteria will only minimally reduce educational differ-

entials that occur along social class lines. If greater equality of educational attainment and achievement is desired, the ability criteria which schools and the larger society so willingly embrace must be carefully scrutinized for their contribution to current inequality.

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